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ABSTRACT

Designed to help political leaders plan and organize a systematic set of government initiatives and policies to improve the quality of life for American families, this document provides a blueprint for mounting a comprehensive effort in support of America's children and their families. The document begins by outlining the need for a national plan, followed by a blueprint for developing and implementing such a plan. The plan focuses on 3 areas: (1) a positive and encompassing vision of what the future should hold for children and families; (2) 10 guiding principles for the provision and delivery of government support for children and their families; and (3) 6 critical steps that comprise a successful implementation strategy, including preparation of a national children's agenda. The document provides a basis for urging political leaders to establish the suggested plan in order to eradicate the inequities faced by America's children and their families. (MM)

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Charting the New Course

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CALL... PLAN FOR THEIR FAMILIES

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A CALL TO ACTION

Watch the evening news any night of the week and what do you see: another tragedy involving children. Drive-by shootings, deaths from child abuse, drug-related violence—it's not a pretty picture.

President Clinton is dedicated to charting a new course for America's children and families. We stand in strong support of his initiatives. Substantial new investment is essential. Yet the nation faces an enormous challenge and more is needed. Those of us who have spent our lives trying to improve the quality of life for children and families know that even the best of piecemeal approaches are not enough.

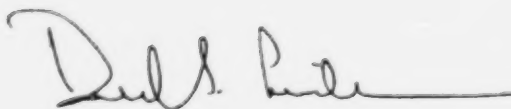
We call on President Clinton—and on all our political leaders—to mount the most comprehensive effort in behalf of our nation's children in America's history. We call for the development and implementation of a *National Plan for Children and Their Families*.

This document, which sets forth a blueprint for such a plan, provides the building blocks for the President and our political leaders, including:

- a vision for our nation's children and their families and for the role government can play in their lives;
- a set of principles to guide and integrate government programs and services for children and their families; and
- an implementation strategy to assure timely, effective, and beneficial results on a national children's agenda.

Establishing and carrying out a *National Plan for Children and Their Families* will not be an easy task. It will require every ounce of energy, brainpower, and political skill we can muster.

Let us begin.



David S. Liederman
Executive Director
Child Welfare League of America

President Roosevelt's words, delivered in 1909 to the 60th Congress as he launched the first White House Conference on Children, are a compelling reminder that the fate of America's children is a matter of national concern. Roosevelt was the first of many in this century to call on government to respond to the needs of at-risk children through increased supports. Today, the challenge he issued to all Americans is even more timely, particularly as President Clinton and the 103rd Congress launch a new era of positive change for America.

Millions of America's children and their families are in jeopardy. Never has the future of this great nation been so closely tied to the productivity of its future work force, its children. And never has an American president been in a better position to take action, to focus and commit the leadership, power, prestige, and authority of his office to strengthening the ability of America's families to nurture, support, and protect their children.

This document is not another status report, research paper, or agenda detailing the serious national neglect of America's children. These things have been done many times and done well—we already know the problems and many ways to ameliorate them.

Across the country there are hundreds, if not thousands, of examples of successful programs. The new Administration has already proposed several initiatives to help move children out of poverty and to guarantee them quality, affordable health care, complete immunizations, enrollment in Head Start, and job training. The Administration foresees expanded efforts to fight family disruption, child abuse and neglect, homelessness, and HIV/AIDS; to make our homes, schools, and streets safer for all our children; and to "revolutionize lifetime learning" and insure that all children start school ready to learn and then receive a "world-class education."

These worthy initiatives, however, lack a cohesive, unifying force. If we are to achieve maximum effectiveness, we need a clear vision and a structure that allows local communities to implement comprehensive programs that make real and visible differences in the quality of life for children and their families. That unifying force is a *National Plan for Children and Their Families*. A *National Plan* will mobilize Americans to take responsibility for our children and their families.

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), whose history is intertwined with the well-being of our nation's children, calls on

President Clinton and the 103rd Congress to begin this era of change with a *National Plan for Children and Their Families*. In the spirit of trust, in the hope of a new beginning, we call on our political leaders to:

- develop and launch a comprehensive *National Plan for Children and Their Families* and to provide a strong and sustained commitment to the implementation of that plan over the next four years; and
- create a *National Council on Children and Their Families*, modeled after the National Economic Council recently created by President Clinton, to develop, guide, and oversee the *National Plan*.

This document, which sets forth a blueprint for such a plan, provides:

- a vision for our nation's children and their families and for the role government can play in their lives;
- a set of principles to guide and integrate government programs and services for children and their families; and
- an implementation strategy to assure timely, effective, and beneficial results on a national children's agenda.

CWLA is a national organization of nearly 700 public and voluntary nonprofit agencies whose dedicated staffs are on the front lines for the most troubled and vulnerable children and their families in our nation. In formulating this blueprint for a *National Plan* and a National Council, we reviewed countless studies and reports; incorporated the best thinking of our nation's leaders, child advocates, academicians, and corporate and foundation executives; and examined and drew upon the recommendations contained in the comprehensive agenda for children and their families developed by the National Commission on Children.

NEW LEADERSHIP—NEW OPPORTUNITIES

This Administration has vowed to work for "America's most unprotected citizens—its children." We have a new leader who believes in "putting people first," who understands America's diverse family life; who relates to the inequities its children bear; who knows that America's children are at risk because of some of the worst problems facing our nation—crime, violence, drugs, HIV/AIDS; and who



recognizes that we are at a pivotal point in history. For perhaps the first time ever, the nation greets a President and First Lady who enter the White House with a strong record of advocacy in behalf of children and their families; who are able to put away the old models, policies, and rhetoric; and who are in a position to launch a new child and family policy agenda.

OUR GREATEST CHALLENGE

The combination of leadership and commitment in our government today presents our nation with a rare opportunity to make great strides for America's children. But it also presents our greatest challenge, coming at a time when our nation faces some of the most difficult economic dilemmas of recent years, when our national spirit is wavering and fragile, and when our government has created an immense, complex, and cumbersome system of services that fails to adequately support children and their families.

President Clinton took office facing the worst economic crisis of a generation. The nation's \$350 billion deficit and \$4 trillion debt have severely limited the resources available to assist families and the ability of society to prepare its youth. Over the last decade, families with children have seen their incomes steadily decline; at the same time, the cost of housing, health care, transportation, and education has steadily increased.

The economic crisis has particularly affected children, who are poorer than any other group in the nation. Stagnating wages for the unskilled and poorly educated, inequalities for racial/ethnic minorities and women, increasing numbers of families headed by teenage parents, and inadequate child support for children in single-parent households impoverish our children even further. Caught in a self-perpetuating cycle, these children grow into youths who lack the education and skills needed to lead productive and fulfilling adult lives.

Other problems—child abuse and neglect, abuse of alcohol and other drugs, HIV/AIDS, escalating crime and violence—affect millions of children and families across mainstream America but have a particularly deleterious impact on the impoverished, those outside the mainstream, the young, and the undereducated. The immense challenges these problems pose lead some to question whether there truly is a solution, whether government can truly lead the country through

the complex issues and interrelationships these problems involve, and whether the national spirit is truly strong enough to meet these challenges head on.

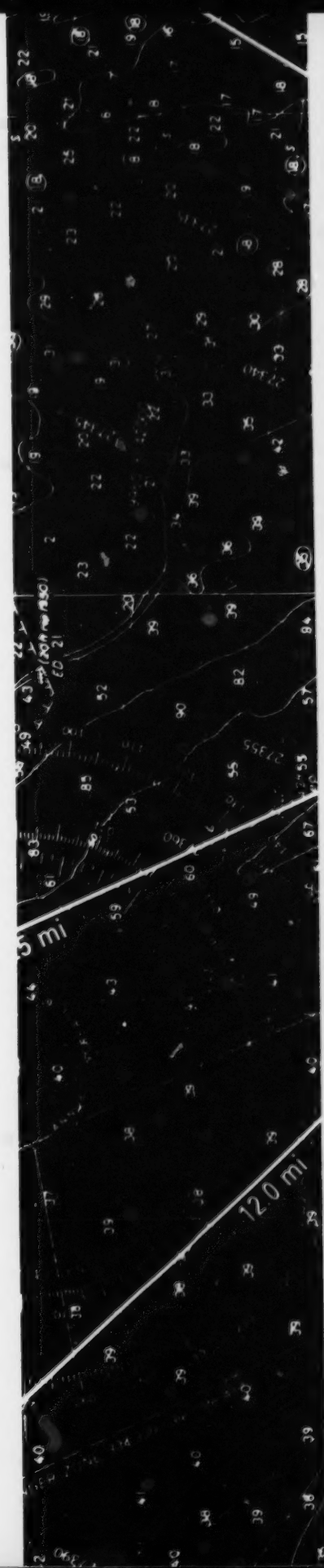
These challenges cannot be met if we maintain a piecemeal system of underfunded, uncoordinated services that place barriers in the paths of those it should serve. The estimated 75 offices, programs, agencies, and initiatives at the federal level that address drug abuse, for example, reflect the categorical and fragmented approach that often characterizes federal programs. Programs often have their own policy, financial, programmatic, training, and/or regulatory responsibilities. Likewise, programs at the state and local levels and their clients suffer from fragmentation, frequent conflicts in administrative oversight, and a lack of adequate funding.

In spite of public optimism as a result of the Clinton-Gore election and the promise of a new era of change for America, the public has lost confidence in the ability of our government to change. Too many have watched as our social, health, and educational programs failed to assist children and their families. Can the Administration address these problems adequately and successfully while the new optimism endures, or will public trust wane as the President and Congress wrestle with other complex problems besetting our nation?

A *National Plan for Children and Their Families* would place the challenges posed by the economy, the critical problems of the 1990s, and our current service delivery system in perspective and find ways to address those challenges. It would provide for the Executive Branch and Congress a critical central focus for planning for children and their families and would serve as a logical next step as the National Commission on Children completes its work in 1993, ensuring that the great strides we envision for America's children are indeed made. The time is right for our children and our future.

THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL PLAN FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

If the President is to achieve his vision, accomplish his goals, and succeed with his initiatives for children, a *National Plan* is essential. It will enable the President to meet the complex challenges he faces by providing an efficient, organized timeline and framework for children's initiatives, so that our nation can succeed in helping all of its children.



I. A National Plan will provide the leadership and vision around which public and political support will coalesce in support of beneficial children's initiatives.

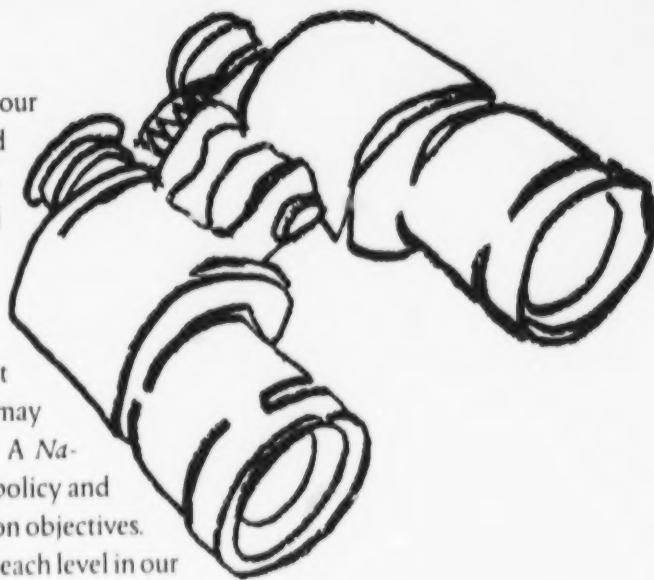
The 1992 presidential campaign represented a benchmark in the struggle to bring the crises facing children and their families to the forefront of public debate. An important political consensus now exists, ready to rally behind the needs of children and their families.

Even as hope builds, however, fears and frustrations are reaching new heights. Americans remain skeptical of the combined ability of the political and bureaucratic levels of government to take appropriate action, to sustain a commitment to positive change, and to be consistent in policy-making. We are bound by a disenchantment with the political process and we fear that our systems of education, government, medical care, and jobs can't meet the needs of today's America, let alone tomorrow's. We have deep and serious concerns about our nation's economy and its negative effects, and about the future we are leaving to our children.

- A *National Plan for Children and Their Families* will rally the public and promote confidence in our combined ability to solve problems. It will give the public an opportunity to see how government can act responsibly and responsively; enlighten the public about the importance of child development, of community support for parenting and child rearing, and of the reality of pay now or pay later; and assure children and their families that their problems will be taken seriously.
- A *National Plan for Children and Their Families* will offer a focal point around which various children's constituencies—child welfare, Head Start, health care, drug abuse prevention and treatment, housing—can unite and acknowledge their many roles and responsibilities. It will provide an opportunity for diverse political forces to work together toward consensus building and toward common objectives and a set of common values. It will offer a big picture of the needs of children and their families, and of the direction in which initiatives can be focused, expanded, and sustained.
- A *National Plan for Children and Their Families* will bring our political leaders together. Today, our leaders are under constant pressure to fund remedial programs and invest in the



prevention and early intervention initiatives our nation needs. Bombarded by disconnected funding alternatives, advocates and lawmakers find themselves compromising on critical components of legislation just to get bills passed, rather than meeting the needs of children through a thorough and cohesive response. The result is policy and spending at every level of government on programs that may inadvertently neutralize each other's gains. A *National Plan* will align federal, state, and local policy and spending toward the achievement of common objectives. It will be informed by an acute sense of what each level in our government is and is not capable of doing.



Strong presidential leadership can bring together the political forces needed to establish a cohesive and comprehensive *National Plan for Children and Their Families*. The *National Plan* will unite lawmakers, advocates, and service providers through a comprehensive system of services and supports. The *National Plan's* vision and guiding principles will shape and guide the development of programs. The *Plan's* agenda will support effective strategies that provide the greatest flexibility, assure the most collaboration, and achieve far-reaching reforms.

2. A *National Plan for Children and Their Families* will bring all the pieces of a national children's agenda together in a single framework.

A *National Plan* will provide the President with an opportunity to look at government from a new perspective and to bring order to the multitude of federal programs and policies designed to support children and families. Our current system of service delivery for children and their families spans every level of government—federal, state, and local—and contains myriad departments, offices, and agencies that in turn regulate, fund, and provide a plethora of direct services. Funding mechanisms are equally diverse—entitlements, block grants, demonstration moneys—and are governed by many different Congressional committees. On the community level, services are provided by local governments, as well as by nonprofit and for-profit agencies, often helped by funds from private foundations and philanthropic programs.

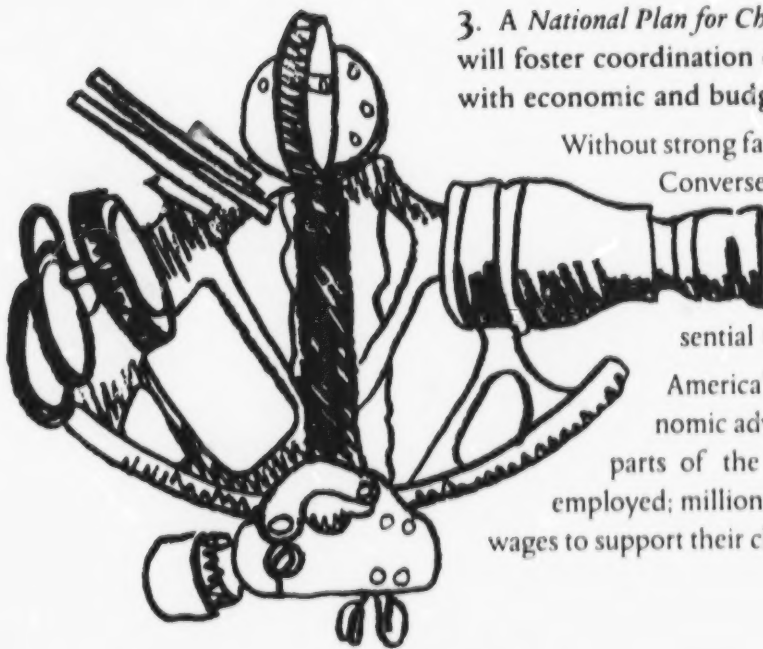
It is not easy to work successfully and cohesively through this complex structure. Families are forced to navigate a bureaucratic maze and overcome countless barriers to get the services they need. Without a *National Plan*, the President's initiatives for children are at risk of being scattered within the giant bureaucracy, fragmented among agencies, lost in the funding arena, or worse, reduced so they offer only a fractional response to the problems facing children and their families.

- A *National Plan for Children and Their Families* will give our nation a program of organized action. Without it, we will be left to struggle with piecemeal, often expensive, "shotgun" approaches to increasingly complex and overwhelming health and social problems. America's domestic policy for children will be left in a state of chaos.
- A *National Plan for Children and Their Families* will provide the organizational and political umbrella to bring the many programs, services, agencies, and organizations into one cohesive, workable framework. It will organize the separate initiatives of health care, housing, child welfare, income security, and education, and integrate their efforts to effectively assist children. It will help us plan wisely and carefully how we will expend our nation's limited financial resources. A *National Plan* will provide the leadership framework to take on the complex bureaucracy and to move us to greater success than ever before in helping children and their families.

3. A *National Plan for Children and Their Families* will foster coordination of children's initiatives with economic and budget policies.

Without strong families, America's economy cannot be strong. Conversely, without a strong economy, America's families cannot be strong. This interdependence makes a national policy that supports children and their families essential to our nation's economic success.

America's children have been hard hit by the economic adversity and distress that plague families in all parts of the country. Millions of workers remain unemployed; millions of others work long hours at poverty-level wages to support their children, unable to provide their families with-



adequate housing, health care, food, or attention. All too often, family stress brought on by poverty becomes a precursor to child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, chronic dependency, and the loss of motivation to get ahead. Far too many children in these families, deprived of hope, grow up feeling angry, alienated, and hostile. Few will live the American dream, unless we implement a plan for change.

- A *National Plan for Children and Their Families* will assure that the most intractable problems facing children and families will be met with the same planning, discipline, and coordination as the most difficult economic problems facing the nation, and that governmental investment, spending, and tax policies will build strong children and a strong economy. It must incorporate the President's economic plan and his many initiatives for children and families, build upon them, and tie them together into a cohesive framework for action. America's future depends upon the health, knowledge, and enterprise of its future work force—its children. A *National Plan for Children and Their Families* is essential to assure the development of that work force.

4. A *National Plan for Children and Their Families* will bring essential help to children and their families.

Our society and government have consistently failed to protect millions of children and support their families. Our failures have weighed heavily on America's families and on the vulnerabilities of our children.

- A *National Plan for Children and Their Families* will lead to reductions in the suffering and misery of millions of our children and their families. Children don't want to grow up hungry and hurting. Parents don't want to watch their children die in the streets from gunshot wounds or see them deprived of a successful, rewarding future. A *National Plan* will remove the obstacles imposed by our economic woes, our lack of resources, our disconnected systems, and our skepticism.

A BLUEPRINT FOR CHANGE

What follows is a blueprint to frame the development and implementation of a *National Plan for Children and Their Families*. It provides

"SOMEWHERE AT THIS VERY
MOMENT, ANOTHER CHILD IS
BORN IN AMERICA. LET IT BE
OUR CAUSE TO GIVE THAT
CHILD A HAPPY HOME, A
HEALTHY FAMILY, A HOPEFUL
FUTURE. LET IT BE OUR CAUSE
TO SEE THAT CHILD REACH THE
FULLEST OF HER GOD-GIVEN
ABILITIES. LET IT BE OUR
CAUSE THAT SHE GROW UP
STRONG AND SECURE, BRACED
BY HER CHALLENGES, BUT
NEVER, NEVER STRUGGLING
ALONE; WITH FAMILY AND
FRIENDS, AND A FAITH THAT IN
AMERICA NO ONE IS LEFT OUT;
NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND.

LET IT BE OUR CAUSE THAT
WHEN SHE IS ABLE, SHE GIVES
SOMETHING BACK TO HER
CHILDREN, HER COMMUNITY,
AND HER COUNTRY. AND LET
IT BE OUR CAUSE TO GIVE HER
A COUNTRY THAT'S COMING
TOGETHER, AND MOVING
AHEAD—A COUNTRY OF
BOUNDLESS HOPES AND
ENDLESS DREAMS; A COUNTRY
THAT ONCE AGAIN LIFTS UP
ITS PEOPLE AND INSPIRES
THE WORLD."

Governor Bill Clinton,
"A New Covenant,"
Democratic National Convention,
New York City (July 16, 1992)

"[THIS] IS AMERICA'S
OPPORTUNITY TO HELP BRIDGE
THE GULF BETWEEN THE HAVES
AND THE HAVE NOTS. THE
QUESTION IS WHETHER
AMERICA WILL DO IT. THERE
IS NOTHING NEW ABOUT
POVERTY. WHAT IS NEW IS
THAT WE NOW HAVE THE
TECHNIQUES AND THE
RESOURCES TO GET RID OF
POVERTY. THE REAL QUESTION
IS WHETHER WE HAVE
THE WILL."

*Martin Luther King, Jr.,
National Cathedral March,
Washington, DC (1968)*

the building blocks to plan and organize a systematic set of government initiatives and policies designed to end the needless waste and suffering of our children.

This blueprint is organized into three sections: 1) a positive and encompassing vision of what the future should hold for our children and families; 2) guiding principles for the provision and delivery of government support for children and their families; and 3) the six critical steps that comprise a successful implementation strategy for a *National Plan for Children and Their Families*—including the preparation of a national children's agenda.

The Vision

If it is to help strengthen the ability of American families to care for their children, a *National Plan for Children and Their Families* must have a clear, positive, and encompassing vision.

- Our vision, first and foremost, is of a nation that understands that its children and youths are worthy of a *National Plan*, initiated by the President.
- Our vision is of a government that prepares for its future and that of its citizens, a government that knows where the nation is going and plans a path to get it there, a government that creates policy and programs that guide and empower the nation's families and prevent problems before they occur.
- Our vision is of a President and political leaders who admit to our national failures affecting the well-being of children and who take immediate and appropriate remedial action.
- Our vision is of a nation that values investment in children—in human capital, human need, and human resources. It is of a President and political leaders who acknowledge that government must accord the development of our young people no less a priority than that given to the security of the nation, for ultimately, the two are inseparable.
- Our vision is of a nation that recognizes that future generations will be shaped and influenced by what happens to today's children and of leaders who understand the relationship between productivity, a capable work force, a stable economy, and how well our children are prepared to face everyday challenges and world competition.

- Our vision is of an acknowledgment that the health and social problems that are wreaking havoc on our children and families—crime, drugs, violence, homelessness, unintended pregnancies, AIDS—do not occur in society in isolation, but are the end result of national neglect and an unwillingness to protect millions of children and youths.
- Our vision is of an end to infant mortality, alcohol and drug abuse, and HIV/AIDS. In our vision, there are no abused or neglected children, no school dropouts, no uneducated children, no homelessness, no discrimination, and no poverty.
- Our vision is of a nation aware that addressing the needs of children requires responding to the needs of their families, keeping them together, and keeping them going. We envision parents who are supported and valued by all levels of society and who have the means to raise their children to be healthy adults prepared for the challenges and responsibilities of life.

Our vision for America's children, therefore, would build a nation as a carpenter builds a house—planning the foundation, the structure, and the parts until the whole is completed. In our vision, we see healthy children born into families that will nurture, protect, and strengthen them; these children, in turn, create their own healthy families, from which strong and healthy communities result.

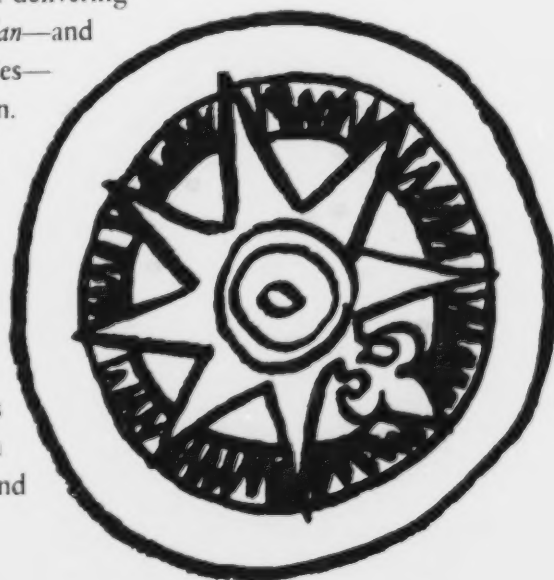
Guiding Principles

A *National Plan for Children and Their Families* must be organized around fairly applied guiding principles for providing and delivering government supports. Without such guidance, the *National Plan*—and the potential it holds for assisting children and their families—would fail for lack of cohesiveness, concreteness, and direction.

The following principles provide an outline for an improved system of government services and supports that will build on proven expertise and tested methods to increase the capacity of families to nurture and protect their children.

I. The system must be comprehensive and inclusive.

Comprehensiveness and inclusiveness are the hallmarks of a system that effectively and compassionately meets a child's needs. Such a system does not compartmentalize and



segregate health, developmental, emotional, housing, nutrition, and income support needs or allow family members to be divided and isolated into separate and distinct government systems of care and support.

2. The system must be child centered.

A child-centered system establishes policies and programs that place the best interests of the child first. It promotes a healthy, productive, and nurturing environment for the child. While recognizing that at certain times and for certain children, such an environment may be outside the child's own family, child-centered policies work to support and preserve the family while ensuring that children are protected and cared for.

3. The system must be family focused.

A family-focused system respects family strengths and diversity, builds on family resources, and seeks to preserve the family as a cohesive and successful unit. It recognizes that children need families—it is in families that children thrive and are loved, educated, and taught family and societal values. A family-focused system works to strengthen families and prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families. It views family members as collaborative partners in service delivery and offers interventions that are designed to strengthen the ability to care for children and to achieve family connectedness.

4. The system must be preventive.

A preventive system allows us to invest in children early in their lives, before serious health, economic, and social problems overwhelm them and their families. Prevention is proactive—strategies can be applied at any point where helping systems come in contact with a child. Prevention is a philosophy of resource allocation and program planning that promotes health and well-being, builds self-esteem, and offers basic family supports before problems develop or worsen. When combined with early intervention strategies that focus on more extensive services for at-risk children and their families, preventive initiatives can eradicate many of the problems facing children and families today.

5. The system must be outcome oriented and accountable.

An accountable, outcome-oriented system expects positive results and measures success in both qualitative and quantitative

terms to evaluate the impact of the services on the client. Without accountability to link expectations and results, programs tend to lack direction, clarity of purpose, and success.

6. The system must be coordinated.

Our current convoluted system of services for children and their families affects resource allocation and service delivery at every level of the government and private sector. Often, many different programs impact on the same problem, each under a different funding or legislative umbrella. The need to negotiate this maze of services and programs frequently has a negative effect on the very children and families the programs were designed to help. Collaboration across disciplines and programs, and service integration to the degree possible, are integral to successfully helping families.

7. The system must be flexible.

The government service delivery system must be more flexible. Government resources and programming must be adaptable to the changing needs of children and their families, without complex and restrictive interpretations of laws and regulations.

8. The system must respect human dignity.

A system that respects the individual inspires a sense of belonging and of contributing to society. It promotes independence in lieu of dependency, and success in lieu of failure.

9. The system must be empowering.

A system that is empowering spawns programs that build on the strengths of children and their families. It supports the development of self-esteem and confidence in one's own ability to solve problems and take control of one's life. It promotes the self-reliance and self-determination that enable families to gain the skills and knowledge they need to improve their lives.

10. The system must be culturally sensitive.

Cultural sensitivity is the need to be responsive to the many diverse cultural and ethnic groups that comprise our nation. A culturally sensitive system recognizes the many faces, languages, and experiences of multicultural diversity and sets a standard of openness and respect for people from all backgrounds.





Implementation Strategy

Successful implementation of a *National Plan for Children and Their Families* must be aggressive and organized if it is to achieve the most effective, timely, and beneficial results for our nation's children.

The implementation strategy sets the stage for significant and fundamental changes in the existing service delivery system. It determines a rational schedule for the generation and allocation of new resources, and allows for the funding of critical programs that are of strategic importance to full implementation of a *National Plan*. The implementation strategy must include methods to lead, energize, and unify numerous constituencies and organizations concerned with children and their families, in both the public and private sectors.

In developing a successful implementation strategy, the following steps are critical.

I. Establish a governance structure to assure the development and implementation of a *National Plan*.

We must establish a National Council on Children and Their Families, modeled after the long-standing National Security Council and the National Economic Council recently created by President Clinton, and predicated on the belief that the nation's children and families are as important to our country as the international security of our boundaries and our economic well-being. In its 1991 report, *Beyond Rhetoric*, the National Commission on Children strongly recommended that the President designate an entity within the White House to assess the well-being of children, set policy priorities, appraise the federal programs and policies serving children, and coordinate executive branch policies toward children. Consistent with that recommendation, the National Council must be located in the White House under the mantle of Presidential authority. Just as a strong system of coordination and collaboration has been developed to facilitate the work of Cabinet and sub-Cabinet officials, so the White House must coordinate a strong system to ensure that a *National Plan* is developed and implemented. Without a strong focal point in the White House in the form of a National Council, it will be difficult—if not impossible—to create and maintain a process for setting priorities, fostering collaboration among the many federal departments and agencies that work with children and their

families, and monitoring implementation of the *National Plan*. A National Council will provide the President with the critical organizational capability he needs to develop the *National Plan* and work with Congress and nongovernmental organizations to move the plan forward.

The executive branch National Council should include those Cabinet-level officials responsible for programs and services affecting children and their families—the Secretaries of Health and Human Services, Education, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Agriculture, and Justice; the head of the Domestic Policy Council; the director of the Office of Management and Budget; and other appropriate persons. The Council will carry out the mandate of the President by institutionalizing the *National Plan*. It will:

- design and develop the *National Plan*, and present it to President Clinton;
- determine which parts of the *National Plan* can be carried out under existing authority and funding, and which parts require new legislative authorization and funding;
- advise the President on national child and family policy and the implementation of a *National Plan for Children and Their Families*;
- coordinate the activities of agencies involved in the implementation of a *National Plan*;
- oversee the policies, expenditures, investments, and actions of federal, state, and local governments within the framework of a *National Plan*; and
- analyze child- and family-related data, including the degree to which outcomes of the *National Plan* have been met.

A thorough examination of previously proposed options and alternatives (i.e., a Cabinet-level agency for children and their families, a Federal Council, an Office of Children's Affairs) could help in deriving the most strategically placed and efficient governmental structure to implement the stated purpose of the *National Plan* and assure Cabinet-level and Congressional involvement.



2. Prepare the agenda for a *National Plan*.

The agenda for a *National Plan* must bring together all the pieces of the puzzle—reforms in health care, child welfare, income support, and education; initiatives in child care, housing, substance abuse, and crime and violence prevention—to form a comprehensive, integrated approach to child and family problems. Relying on the agenda's structure, we can enact sensible, straightforward legislation explicitly geared to meeting the important needs of children; design new government services and expand and improve existing ones; and dedicate adequate resources to strengthening the ability of families to provide for their children.

Already existing agendas resulting from the work of national, state, and local groups across the nation can guide the development of the *National Plan for Children and Their Families'* agenda. These groups include within their ranks many of the nation's leading experts, advocates, policymakers, and elected officials at every level of government, as well as foundation funders, researchers, and consumers working together toward shared goals. In addition, state and local reports have much to offer in understanding how national policies are carried out on a community level, as well as how innovative and successful programs work to help children and their families.

In particular, the following reports should be considered.

- *Beyond Rhetoric: A New American Agenda for Children and Families* was issued by the National Commission on Children in 1991. The National Commission's report, together with its *Implementation Guides*, offers valuable information and direction for a Children's Agenda that can be carried out by parents, employers, communities, states, and the federal government.
- *The Blueprint for a Better Tomorrow: A Plan for Federal Investment in Education* was developed in 1992 by the Committee for Education Funding, a national coalition of education associations, institutions, and organizations whose interests range from preschool to postgraduate education in both public and private systems. It lays the groundwork for initiatives that will lead to the achievement of the National Education Goals by the end of the decade.
- *A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Nonschool Hours* is a 1992 report of the Carnegie Task Force on Youth Develop-

ment and Community Programs. It represents the best thinking of many youth development experts and leaders throughout the country. It submits recommendations and a call to action for aggressive and creative initiatives in behalf of young adolescents.

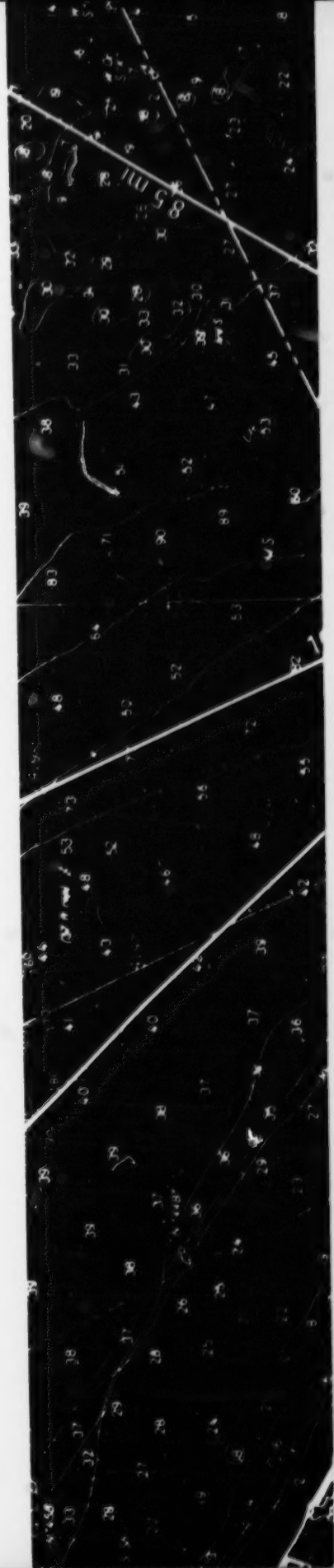
- *Investing in Children and Youth, Reconstructing Our Cities: Doing What Works to Reverse the Betrayal of Democracy* is a report issued by the Milton Eisenhower Foundation in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. It urges that we spend \$300 billion on initiatives that invest in our children and youth and revitalize our cities.
- *Charting the New Course: Children's Legislative Agenda for 1993* is a compilation by the Child Welfare League of America of the full range of legislative initiatives required to meet the needs of our most vulnerable children, youths, and families.

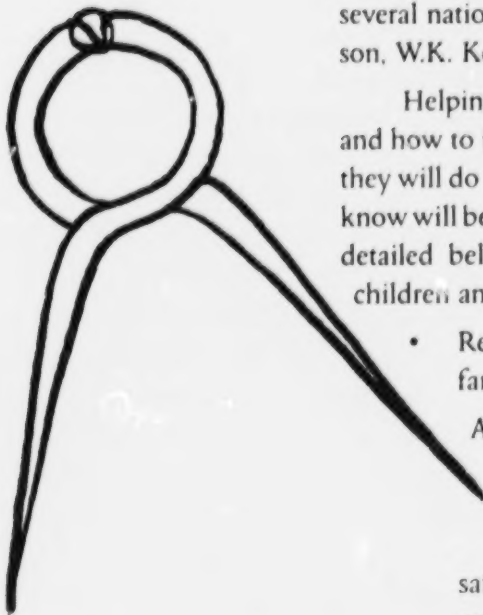
Taken together, these materials effectively assess the problems, propose solutions, and present strategies that can guide the development of a national agenda for children and their families.

3. Designate adequate new federal resources to support needed improvements and enhancements.

An investment of significant new federal dollars is essential to the success of a *National Plan for Children and Their Families*. The cost of new investments in children and their families is modest when compared to the true cost to society of continued inaction—rising emergency room and intensive care costs, soaring prison populations, dramatic increases in child abuse and neglect. The cost of new investment pales when compared to the lost productivity of future generations of children who are incapable of self-support or of contributing to society.

Many sources already exist that expertly assess resource needs, detail funding levels, and suggest specific ways to garner resources for children and families. The report of the National Commission on Children, for example, deals extensively with estimates of new federal costs and of financing options, including strategies for taxation and for recapture of funds from other areas of the federal budget. Other important bodies of work by individuals and groups outline resource allocations dedicated to improving the lives of children and their families. Of particular value are recent recommendations on the urban





crisis from the U.S. Conference on Mayors, the Urban Institute, and several national foundations—Ford, Rockefeller, Robert Wood Johnson, W.K. Kellogg, and Charles S. Mott.

Helping families with children is a matter of understanding when and how to intervene responsively, and how to target resources where they will do the most good. It involves institutionalizing the things we know will benefit children and their families. The three-point approach detailed below should guide the allocation of resources to serve children and their families.

- Resources must be available to provide basic supports for all families with children, but particularly those at risk.

All families need quality education for their children, assurance that their jobs will pay enough to allow them a decent standard of living; employers who support their roles as parents; access to excellent, affordable health care; safe and effective schools; neighborhoods free of violence and drugs; and opportunities for their children to obtain higher education and productive jobs when they reach adulthood. Funding these programs must be an essential ingredient of this country's taxation policies.

- Resources must be available to provide prevention and early intervention services.

Families at-risk of serious problems—especially young families, those headed by single parents, and those whose members lack adequate education and training—need more government assistance. Parents in these families need a “jump-start”—interventions and supportive programs provided early in their role as parents (i.e., Head Start, subsidized child care, family preservation) and access to prenatal care and immunizations for their children. These basic supports can save millions of children from suffering and neglect, at a cost significantly less than that of later remedial measures.

- Resources must be available to provide intensive, remediative interventions.

Children already caught in a cycle of deprivation, lack of education, severe poverty, abuse, violence, addiction, and disease, will need more intensive interventions: quality foster

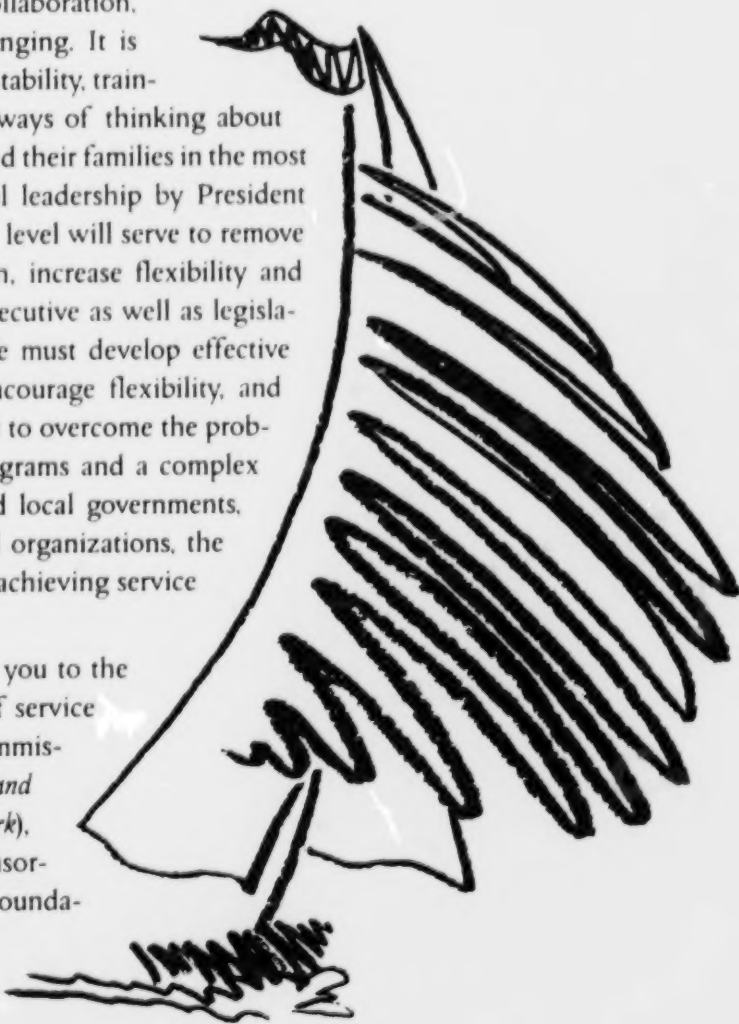
care and adoption assistance, substance abuse treatment, or mental health services. For these children, we must act immediately and decisively, with full funding of extensive remediative services and treatment. We can save most of these children and restore their lives, but only with appropriate, timely interventions.

4. Create an integrated service system to achieve positive outcomes for children and their families at the local level.

The service delivery system in this country must undergo certain fundamental changes and enhancements in order to actualize a *National Plan for Children and Their Families*. These changes—which focus on the current disorganized, cumbersome, and often costly process of serving children and their families—encompass a broad spectrum of issues.

The task of service integration, collaboration, and coordination is complex and challenging. It is laden with issues of costs, barriers, accountability, training, and evaluation. It will require new ways of thinking about gathering services together for children and their families in the most effective manner possible. Strong federal leadership by President Clinton and Congress and at the Cabinet level will serve to remove obstacles such as program categorization, increase flexibility and simplicity, and create structures in the executive as well as legislative branch to facilitate coordination. We must develop effective strategies to maximize collaboration, encourage flexibility, and extend the reach of our reforms if we are to overcome the problems implicit in separate, categorical programs and a complex delivery system. Together with state and local governments, national foundations, and state and local organizations, the federal government must take the lead in achieving service integration.

For content and direction, we refer you to the many leaders in research and discussion of service integration, including the National Commission on Children (*Next Steps for Children and Families: Making Programs and Policies Work*), the Education and Human Services Consortium (funded by the William T. Grant Founda-



tion), the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Lily Endowment, the Children's Initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts, and the Family Impact Seminar of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy.

5. Enhance public/private partnership to allow maximum investment in children and their families.

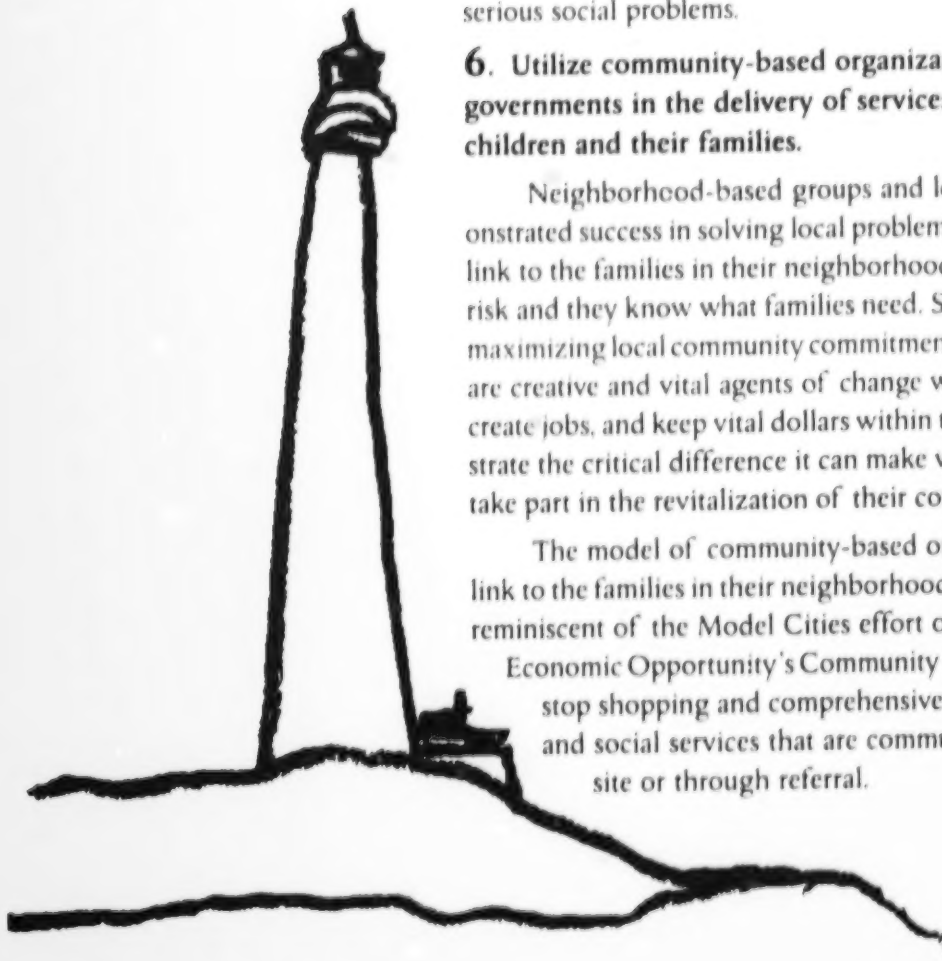
The intrinsic value in having a community invest in itself is monumental—such a community works to assure the most effective response to social problems. The opportunity for public/private partnerships must be formally and concretely built into every government initiative in a manner that is proficient and productive.

The nation's private foundations and corporate philanthropies already invest large sums in programs for children and their families. Public/private partnerships can increase the supply of resources available to implement a *National Plan for Children and Their Families* as well as broaden local commitment and community involvement in solving serious social problems.

6. Utilize community-based organizations and local governments in the delivery of services and supports to children and their families.

Neighborhood-based groups and local governments have demonstrated success in solving local problems. These groups offer a direct link to the families in their neighborhoods; they know the children at risk and they know what families need. Such groups can be the key to maximizing local community commitment, energy, and resources. They are creative and vital agents of change who stabilize neighborhoods, create jobs, and keep vital dollars within the community. They demonstrate the critical difference it can make when people at the local level take part in the revitalization of their community.

The model of community-based organizations offering a direct link to the families in their neighborhoods is not new. Older models—reminiscent of the Model Cities effort of the 1960s or the Office of Economic Opportunity's Community Action Programs—offer one-stop shopping and comprehensive integrated health, education, and social services that are community-based and available on-site or through referral.



New community models also stress neighborhood involvement and networking, as exemplified in the work of The Pew Charitable Trusts' Children's Initiative. This recently initiated 11-year effort represents a shift in how society supports families with children, creating neighborhood-based family centers as the hub of a new system of inclusionary services for children and their families. An important component of this system is support intended to improve family functioning and child health and development through intensive partnerships with families. We must dedicate resources to build the infrastructure and capacity of these and other important neighborhood programs. The implementation of a *National Plan* will succeed if it is carried out locally by local leaders and local organizations.

IN CLOSING

A *National Plan for Children and Their Families* can make great strides toward assuring that all children in America receive the protection, nurturing, and support they need.

The establishment of a *National Plan* will provide President Clinton and the leadership of the 103rd Congress with the tools to eradicate the inequities America's children and their families face. It offers the President a framework through which he can fully commit his leadership to a comprehensive, coordinated, and integrated children's agenda and direct his power to collaborative implementation at the state, community, and family level. A *National Plan for Children and Their Families* will help to build public support for positive and effective change, will guide effective spending, and will ensure that children and their families get the support and assistance they need.

We urge President Clinton to take the historic first step of establishing a *National Plan for Children and Their Families* and to lead the nation and its children into a future filled with opportunity, security, and success.

When another leader committed to equality and dignity, presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy, made a speech to youths at the University of California in Berkeley in 1966, President Clinton was himself a college student. Nearly 30 years later, we urge President Clinton and our nation's political leaders to once again hear Robert Kennedy's challenge.

"[THIS IS] ONE OF THE RAREST MOMENTS IN HISTORY—A TIME WHEN ALL AROUND US THE OLD ORDER OF THINGS IS CRUMBLING AND A NEW WORLD SOCIETY IS PAINFULLY STRUGGLING TO TAKE SHAPE. IF YOU SHRINK FROM THIS STRUGGLE, AND THESE MANY DIFFICULTIES, YOU WILL BETRAY THE TRUST WHICH YOUR OWN POSITION FORCES UPON YOU. YOU LIVE IN THE MOST PRIVILEGED NATION ON EARTH. YOU ARE THE MOST PRIVILEGED CITIZENS OF THAT PRIVILEGED NATION... YOU CAN USE YOUR ENORMOUS PRIVILEGE AND OPPORTUNITY TO SEEK PURELY PRIVATE PLEASURE AND GAIN. BUT HISTORY WILL JUDGE YOU, AND, AS THE YEARS PASS, YOU WILL ULTIMATELY JUDGE YOURSELF, ON THE EXTENT TO WHICH YOU HAVE USED YOUR GIFTS TO LIGHTEN AND ENRICH THE LIVES OF [OTHERS]. IN YOUR HANDS... IS THE FUTURE OF YOUR WORLD AND THE FULFILLMENT OF THE BEST QUALITIES OF YOUR OWN SPIRIT."

Robert F. Kennedy,
University of California,
Berkeley, CA
(October 22, 1966)

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